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Hon. Victoria Nuland
Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs
U.S. Department of State
Harry S. Truman Building
2201 C Street Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20520
United States

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Dear Secretary Nuland

First and most importantly, welcome to Lebanon. It saddens me that you are visiting our country at a time when people need so much and the challenges ahead seem so insurmountable. But this makes your trip – and the leadership and engagement -- of the United States even more important.

While it pains me to write this, I am compelled to let you know what Lebanon does not need: support from the international community that simply backs any government, regardless of who the leaders are or what their past behavior has been. This approach has been repeatedly and comprehensively proven to be a poor strategy and must change to something that offers people hope for a different future. We need lots of support in so many ways from the international community, but it must be smart support that delivers results to the Lebanese people.

The new Lebanese government was created under the old sectarian system and will all but certainly fail itself. The 24 cabinet ministers were chosen along sectarian lines and patron loyalties—not based on their experience or capacity to perform the duties required, which is what the people of Lebanon need to get out of this mess. In other words, nothing has changed so the results will just be the same. As long as the corrupt and -- let's be honest -- overwhelmingly male, political class and their acolytes are doing business the same way, any assistance – and it is much needed by so many people – will be rewarding years of malfeasance with only those in power benefitting. Sadly, the real problem is that Lebanon is ruled by an organized mafia.

We have repeatedly seen that when the international community bails out Lebanon's political regime, the country falls deeper into the hands of malign forces that strengthen their stranglehold over Lebanese state institutions, making reform from within the system increasingly difficult. In addition, donors have significant concerns that any direct budgetary support to the Lebanese government could ultimately end up in the wrong hands, like Hezbollah. Even worse, the aid can be used to further deepen the broken system and used as a

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mechanism to secure support for the ruling regime in the upcoming parliamentary elections currently scheduled for Spring of 2022.

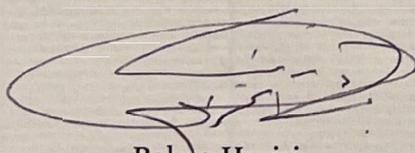
The people of Lebanon are exhausted and beyond ready for change. But if support comes in as it has in the past, Lebanon will be forever lost. It is time to funnel support to mobilize the opposition and bring an end to this loop of corruption. Donors know who the corrupt class is, yet they continue to engage and provide them with political cover.

It is my hope that you will meet with ordinary Lebanese people. It is here that you will find the rays of hope and promise in what often seems like impenetrable darkness. Lebanese — of all generations — are taking to the streets to ensure their demands for a different future are heard. Through their concerted actions they have shown they can step in where the looted government has failed. For example, educational institutions like the Lebanese American University and the American University of Beirut are restoring a sense of normalcy to their students through their vaccination campaigns with the support of donors and the diaspora. NGOs and other community-based organizations have established distribution of food, medicines and even solar panels for the generation of power for those most in need. This is where the United States and the international community needs to shift its support to, ensuring aid is going to the people who need it the most.

Lebanon's future is non-sectarian, democratic and needs to be realized by leaders that are not tainted by the shame of corruption and working with Hezbollah. It is simply a fact that terrorist organizations do not build nations, they destroy countries. Indeed, together with a pernicious and kleptocratic class of politicians that has been willing to put their personal interests before those of the people, Hezbollah and its backer, Iran, have brought Lebanon to near-destruction.

We cannot let this continue. The United States and the rest of the international community should leverage its support to produce real and genuine reform led by statesmen and stateswomen who have the ability and political will to govern a citizen's state. Now is the time for a strategic shift. Lebanon needs and wants it. The United States and its global partners should demand it.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bahaa Hariri', enclosed within a hand-drawn oval border.

Bahaa Hariri

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